

When should we expect launch prices and dates for 2020's new consoles?

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- Fig. 1: The available lead time for launch details on the PS5 and Xbox Series X is already way below average.
- Fig. 2: Once you take Nintendo out of the picture, the PS5 and Xbox Series X launch detail timing looks even more abnormal.

As August transitions into September, both Sony and Microsoft continue their marketing push for new high-end game consoles promised by the end of the year. But with just 90 days to go until Thanksgiving, the public at large is still waiting on both companies to reveal important details about the price and specific launch dates for the PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X.

While this situation isn't unprecedented in recent history, it is unusual. And if we don't get public price and launch date announcements by the end of September, we'd be in largely uncharted territory for modern console releases.

An above-average wait

As shown in the figures above and the chart below, console makers have usually given the public more warning of their

launch plans than they're set to this year. In the 12 console launches since 2000, the all-important price and release date announcements have come an average of 128 days before the actual console launch, or a median of about 153 days (for the North American launch).

Assuming early November launches for the PS5 and Xbox Series X, that would mean we should have expected this information to be publicized in June or early July, on average.

This console cycle looks even weirder if you separate recent console launches by company. That's because Nintendo brings down the overall average by generally keeping its launch plans close to its chest for as long as possible. The price and release date for the Switch, for instance, were revealed just 50 days before the system's March 2017 launch, the shortest turnaround in the last two decades.

Company	Console	NA Release Date	Launch details announced	Difference (days)
Sony	PS2	10/26/2000	5/13/2000	166
Microsoft	Xbox	11/15/2001	5/16/2001	183
Nintendo	Gamecube	11/18/2001	5/17/2001	185
Microsoft	Xbox 360	11/22/2005	8/18/2005	96
Sony	PS3	11/17/2006	5/9/2006	192
Nintendo	Wii	11/19/2006	9/14/2006	66
Nintendo	Wii U	11/18/2012	9/13/2012	66
Sony	PS4	11/15/2013	6/10/2013	158
Microsoft	Xbox One	11/22/2013	6/10/2013	165
Sony	PS4 Pro	11/10/2016	9/7/2016	64
Nintendo	Switch	3/3/2017	1/12/2017	50
Microsoft	Xbox One X	11/7/2017	6/11/2017	149

(We're disregarding console launches from the '90s and earlier

because the largely pre-Internet media environment of the time was different enough to make modern comparisons a bit troublesome. Still, Sega's surprise early launch of the Saturn the same day as availability and pricing was announced at E3 1995 deserves special mention here, at least.)

For Sony and Microsoft, though, leaving important launch details secret until less than three months out is practically unheard of. The only exception is the PS4 Pro, which was fully unveiled to the press and public just 64 days before its November 2016 launch. If the PS5 is going to launch before Black Friday, Sony is running out of time to avoid setting a new company record with this year's announcement timing.

What's the hold-up?

So why isn't 2020 console marketing timing aligning with historical norms? The lack of a physical electronic Entertainment Expo this year may have something to do with it. Microsoft and Sony overwhelmingly use E3 press conferences in May or June to fully unveil the details of upcoming launches in October or November, in order to maximize public attention.

Without a centralized press gathering this year, both companies have been left scrambling a bit with remote technical presentations and sizzle reel trailers instead. The coronavirus pandemic also means neither company has been able to host demo events where the press can get hands-on time with new hardware ahead of its launch, further complicating marketing plans and schedules.

There also may be a bit of a game of chicken going on with price announcements this year. Neither Sony nor Microsoft wants to announce a launch price for their console only to be undercut by the competition right away. The unveiling of a \$400 PS4, which came mere hours after a \$500 Xbox One unveiling in June 2013, shows just how impactful that kind of pricing difference can be. And with reports suggesting that

new consoles may retail for \$500 or more at launch this year, neither Sony nor Microsoft wants to be seen as the more unaffordable choice during a pandemic-induced recession.

The other possibility, of course, is that Sony and Microsoft aren't actually going to hit their late 2020 console launch targets after all. Both companies have been publicly confident that they'll still be able to launch this year, despite pandemic-fueled disruptions to the global supply chain. Sony even began registering early customer interest in PS5 pre-orders for the PS5, suggesting its reveal of launch details is imminent.

Still, delays in console launches aren't unprecedented; the Nintendo 64 famously bounced from a planned Christmas 1995 launch to an April 1996 target before finally limping onto North American shelves in September 1996 in North America. And Sony has already reportedly reduced its PS5 production plans because of expected reductions in consumer spending this year.

With delays for high-profile next-generation console games like *Halo Infinite*, *Deathloop*, and *Vampire: The Masquerade: Bloodlines 2*, pushing the new consoles into next year might not be the worst idea.

If Sony and Microsoft are going to release new consoles this year, though, both companies are running out of time to tell consumers when they'll be available and how much they'll cost. If those announcements don't come before the end of September, we're really going to have to wonder what's going on behind the scenes.

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